THE NEW YORKER

Tuesday, and After - New Yorker writers respond to 9/11.

By John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Roger Angell, Aharon Appelfeld, Rebecca Mead, Susan Sontag, Amitav Ghosh, and Donald Antrim

In the wake of last week's terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, *New Yorker* staff writers and contributors reflect on the tragedy and its consequences. This week's Talk of the Town is devoted entirely to the incident, and includes contributions from John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Roger Angell, Aharon Appelfeld, Rebecca Mead, Susan Sontag, Amitav Ghosh, and Donald Antrim.

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Suddenly summoned to witness something great and horrendous, we keep fighting not to reduce it to our own smallness. From the viewpoint of a tenth-floor apartment in Brooklyn Heights, where I happened to be visiting some kin, the destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers had the false intimacy of television, on a day of perfect reception. A four-year-old girl and her babysitter called from the library, and pointed out through the window the smoking top of the north tower, not a mile away. It seemed, at that first glance, more curious than horrendous: smoke speckled with bits of paper curled into the cloudless sky, and strange inky rivulets ran down the giant structure's vertically corrugated surface. The W.T.C. had formed a pale background to our Brooklyn view of lower Manhattan, not beloved, like the stony, spired midtown thirties skyscrapers it had displaced as the city's tallest, but, with its pre-postmodern combination of unignorable immensity and architectural reticence, in some lights beautiful. As we watched the second tower burst into ballooning flame (an intervening building had hidden the approach of the second airplane), there persisted the notion that, as on television, this was not quite real; it could be fixed; the technocracy the towers symbolized would find a way to put out the fire and reverse the damage.

And then, within an hour, as my wife and I watched from the Brooklyn building's roof, the south tower dropped from the screen of our viewing; it fell straight down like an elevator, with a tinkling shiver and a groan of concussion distinct across the mile of air. We knew we had just witnessed thousands of deaths; we clung to each other as if we ourselves were falling. Amid the glittering impassivity of the many buildings across the East River, an empty spot had appeared, as if by electronic command, beneath the sky that, but for the sulfurous cloud streaming south toward the ocean, was pure blue, rendered uncannily pristine by the absence of jet trails. A swiftly expanding burst of smoke and dust hid the rest of lower Manhattan; we saw the collapse of the second tower only on television, where the footage

of hellbent airplane, exploding jet fuel, and imploding tower was played and replayed, much rehearsed moments from a nightmare ballet.

The nightmare is still on. The bodies are beneath the rubble, the last-minute cell-phone calls—remarkably calm and loving, many of them—are still being reported, the sound of an airplane overhead still bears an unfamiliar menace, the thought of boarding an airplane with our old blasé blitheness keeps receding into the past. Determined men who have transposed their own lives to a martyr's afterlife can still inflict an amount of destruction that defies belief. War is conducted with a fury that requires abstraction—that turns a planeful of peaceful passengers, children included, into a missile the faceless enemy deserves. The other side has the abstractions; we have only the mundane duties of survivors—to pick up the pieces, to bury the dead, to take more precautions, to go on living.

American freedom of motion, one of our prides, has taken a hit. Can we afford the openness that lets future kamikaze pilots, say, enroll in Florida flying schools? A Florida neighbor of one of the suspects remembers him saying he didn't like the United States: "He said it was too lax. He said, 'I can go anywhere I want to, and they can't stop me.' " It is a weird complaint, a begging perhaps to be stopped. Weird, too, the silence of the heavens these days, as flying has ceased across America. But fly again we must; risk is a price of freedom, and walking around Brooklyn Heights that afternoon, as ash drifted in the air and cars were few and open-air lunches continued as usual on Montague Street, renewed the impression that, with all its failings, this is a country worth fighting for. Freedom, reflected in the street's diversity and daily ease, felt palpable. It is mankind's elixir, even if a few turn it to poison.

The next morning, I went back to the open vantage from which we had watched the tower so dreadfully slip from sight. The fresh sun shone on the eastward façades, a few boats tentatively moved in the river, the ruins were still sending out smoke, but New York looked glorious.

—John Updike

♦

The one recurring nightmare I've had for many years is about the end of the world, and it goes like this. In a crowded, modern cityscape not unlike lower Manhattan, I'm flying a jetliner down an avenue where everything is wrong. It seems impossible that the buildings to either side of me won't shear my wings off, impossible that I can keep the plane aloft while moving at such a low speed. The way is always blocked, but somehow I manage to turn a sharp corner or to pilot the plane beneath an overpass, only to confront a skyscraper so high that I would have to rise vertically to clear it. As I pull the plane into a dismayingly shallow climb,

the skyscraper looms and rushes forward to meet me, and I wake up, with unspeakable relief, in my ordinary bed.

Last Tuesday there was no awakening. You found your way to a TV and watched. Unless you were a very good person indeed, you were probably, like me, experiencing the collision of several incompatible worlds inside your head. Besides the horror and sadness of what you were watching, you might also have felt a childish disappointment over the disruption of your day, or a selfish worry about the impact on your finances, or admiration for an attack so brilliantly conceived and so flawlessly executed, or, worst of all, an awed appreciation of the visual spectacle it produced.

Never mind whether certain Palestinians were or were not dancing in the streets. Somewhere—you can be absolutely sure of this—the death artists who planned the attack were rejoicing over the terrible beauty of the towers' collapse. After years of dreaming and working and hoping, they were now experiencing a fulfillment as overwhelming as any they could have allowed themselves to pray for. Perhaps some of these glad artists were hiding in ruined Afghanistan, where the average life expectancy is barely forty. In that world you can't walk through a bazaar without seeing men and children who are missing limbs.

In *this* world, where the Manhattan skyline has now been maimed and the scorched wreckage at the Pentagon is reminiscent of Kabul, I'm trying to imagine what I don't want to imagine: the scene inside a plane one moment before impact. At the controls, a terrorist is raising a prayer of thanks to Allah in expectation of instant transport from this world to the next one, where houris will presently reward him for his glorious success. At the back of the cabin, huddled Americans are trembling and moaning and, no doubt, in many cases, praying to their God for a diametrically opposite outcome. And then, a moment later, for hijacker and hijacked alike, the world ends.

On the street, after the impact, survivors spoke of being delivered from death by God's guidance and grace. But even they, the survivors, were stumbling out of the smoke into a different world. Who would have guessed that everything could end so suddenly on a pretty Tuesday morning? In the space of two hours, we left behind a happy era of Game Boy economics and trophy houses and entered a world of fear and vengeance. Even if you'd been waiting for the nineties-ending crash throughout the nineties, even if you'd believed all along that further terrorism in New York was only a matter of when and not of whether, what you felt on Tuesday morning wasn't intellectual satisfaction, or simply empathetic horror, but deep grief for the loss of daily life in prosperous, forgetful times: the traffic jammed by delivery trucks and unavailable cabs, "Apocalypse Now Redux" in local theatres, your date for drinks downtown on Wednesday, the sixty-three homers of Barry Bonds, the hourly AOL updates on J. Lo's doings. On Monday morning, the front-page headline in the *News* had

been “KIPS BAY TENANTS SAY: WE’VE GOT KILLER MOLD.” This front page is (and will, for a while, remain) amazing.

The challenge in the old world, the nineties world of Bill Clinton, was to remember that, behind the prosperity and complacency, death was waiting and entire countries hated us. The problem of the new world, the zeroes world of George Bush, will be to reassert the ordinary, the trivial, and even the ridiculous in the face of instability and dread: to mourn the dead and then try to awaken to our small humanities and our pleasurable daily nothing-much.

—*Jonathan Franzen*

♦

Several times during the nineteen-nineties I did some reporting from what we generally call trouble spots, and witnessing the almost total devastation of some of these places (Somalia, Afghanistan, the southern Philippines, Liberia) had me wondering if I would ever see such trouble in my own country: if I would ever feel it necessary to stay close to the radio or television; if I would sleep with the window wide open in order to hear the approach of the engines of war or to smell the smoke of approaching fires or to stay aware of the movements of emergency teams coping with the latest enormity; if I would one day see American ground heaped with the ruins of war; if I would ever hear Americans saying, “They’re attacking the Capitol! The Pentagon! The White House!”; if I would stand in the midst of an American crowd witnessing the kind of destruction that can be born of the wickedness of the human imagination, or turn to examine American faces a few seconds after their eyes had taken it in; if I would one day see American streets choked with people who don’t know exactly where they’re going but don’t feel safe where they are; and if I would someday feel uncontrollably grateful to be able to get my laundry done and to find simple commerce persisting in spite of madness. I wondered if the wars I’d gone looking for would someday come looking for us.

Travelling in the Third World, I’ve found that to be an American sometimes means to be wondrously celebrated, to excite a deep, instantaneous loyalty in complete strangers. In the southern Philippines, a small delegation headed by a village captain once asked that I take steps to have their clan and their collection of two dozen huts placed under the protection of the United States. Later, in the same region, a teen-age Islamic separatist guerrilla among a group I’d been staying with begged me to adopt him and take him to America. In Afghanistan, I encountered men who, within minutes of meeting me, offered to leave their own worried families and stay by my side as long as I required it, men who found medicine somewhere in the ruins of Kabul for me when I needed it, and who never asked for anything back—all simply because I was American.

On the other hand, I think we sense—but don't care always to apprehend—the reality that some people hate America. To many suffering souls, we must seem incomprehensibly aloof and self-centered, or worse. For nearly a century, war has rolled lopsidedly over the world, crushing the innocent in their homes. For half that century, the United States has been seen, by some people, as keeping the destruction rolling without getting too much in the way of it—has been seen, by some people, to lurk behind it. And those people hate us. The acts of terror against this country—the hijackings, the kidnappings, the bombings of our airplanes and barracks and embassies overseas, and now these mass atrocities on our own soil—tell us how much they hate us. They hate us as people hate a bad God, and they'll kill themselves to hurt us.

On Thursday, as I write in New York City, which I happened to be visiting at the time of the attack, the wind has shifted, and a sour electrical smoke travels up the canyons between the tall buildings. I have now seen two days of war in the biggest city in America. But imagine a succession of such days stretching into years—years in which explosions bring down all the great buildings, until the last one goes, or until bothering to bring the last one down is just a waste of ammunition. Imagine the people who have already seen years like these turn into decades—imagine their brief lifetimes made up only of days like these we've just seen in New York.

—*Denis Johnson*

♦

Waking the next morning—was that sleep, at any point?—you find the unwanted memory waiting. There's nothing new about this if you've lived awhile. Waking comes and at first only that, and then the flood of what can't be undone. One such moment came the day after Bobby Kennedy was shot in Los Angeles—the polls had just closed out there, late enough here so that you were watching him speak on the little bedroom television, with the lights out and someone already asleep next to you in the dark room. Bobby holding up that bit of paper and saying, "And now it's on to Chicago . . . ," and you getting up to go over to click off the TV, when it changed, the world changed, and you woke up the sleeper with your cries and did away with one more night of decent sleep for her. The next morning, you both awoke bereft and older—the whole country felt this way—and in need of revision. This week has been different but the same: how innocent we were back then in the sixties and back last Monday.

When the second tower came down, you cried out once again, seeing it on the tube at home, and hurried out onto the street to watch the writhing fresh cloud lift above the buildings to the south, down at the bottom of this amazing and untouchable city, but you were not surprised, even amid such shock, by what you found in yourself next and saw in the faces

around you—a bump of excitement, a secret momentary glow. Something is happening and I'm still here. You recognize the survivor's spasm from a lifetime of bad news: your neighbor's son's car crash, your tennis partner's blastoma, Chernobyl, or the Copacabana fire, or putting on the same sombre tie before another irreplaceable friend's memorial service. This is not to be borne, but still . . .

Such days and moments pass, in ways that this one has not, but there's a weary strength in experience, even in the midst of horror. In the very first ghastly downtown explosion we can remember, the package arrived by horse and wagon. We're in a new kind of war, they keep saying now, but we've been to wars before. Old people have been there, there's that to be said for us, and sometimes we've even allowed ourselves a moment of dumb pride in it. Laughing a little at Tom Brokaw's goo about our generation, groaning at the choir music behind the titles to "Band of Brothers," we can think, I was in that stuff, too, but in truth what we've been good at all this time is bystanding. Our own war felt like immensely long and tedious stretches of "And now for something completely different!" with people dying in gigantic numbers but mostly somewhere else. All this time, we've forced ourselves to imagine what it was like to be there—in Guadalcanal, in Stalingrad, at Khe Sanh, in Sarajevo and Belfast and Palestine—and found the apparatus wanting.

Bad news is unimaginable, but it keeps on coming and keeps on ending, as the distantly awful or immediately scary wears down into Then and, in time, to Back Then. Pearl Harbor came in the middle of a Sunday-afternoon bridge game at college. A first friend went down piloting a Navy bomber in Louisiana, in training, and there were more. Guys in our troopship bay whose luck ran out at Saipan. A brother-in-law shot again and again and lying for two days on the field at Belfort Gap—he persists, smiles gently, bent over his canes. We woke up to Hiroshima, Dallas came at lunchtime, and My Lai by slow degrees. Young people have been looking at us lately and saying, "I don't see how you could have done that, gone through so much. It's beyond my imagination," and we think, Kid, there's nothing to it. Just wait and see.

Now that's over. Now we're all the same age together. None of us is young this week, and, with death and calamity just down the street, few of us vicarious any longer.

—*Roger Angell*

♦

For almost a year now, Jerusalem has been under siege. Not a day goes by without something terrible happening: a man stabbed in a quiet street, a bomb exploding from a watermelon, a booby-trapped car. Just weeks ago, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the center of town,

injuring dozens of innocent people. Shrewd enemies, hidden from sight, are fighting in this city of stone.

Every day, I go to Ticho, my coffee shop, which is in a garden in an old house in the heart of the city. Despite the threat of danger, everyone seems to go out. Often, it seems as if life is able to continue because of the shared illusion that "this won't happen to me." At Ticho, I read a newspaper or a book, or work on a manuscript. In the past, people who recognized me didn't interfere with my privacy. But recently they have stopped to inquire after my health and to ask my opinion of the stressful situation.

I am a writer, not a prophet or a political analyst. Like everyone else, I am groping in this darkness. From a writer, people expect a wise word or a joke. But what can one say when what is happening blunts the few thoughts that one has? I try to overcome the uncertainty by working every day. I am in the middle of a novel, progressing sluggishly, writing and erasing. It seems that the daily disturbances are stronger than internal motivation. It is hard to be with oneself when everything around is burning.

I used to feel that those of us who had suffered in the Holocaust were immune to fear. I was wrong. We are more sensitive to danger. We can smell it. A few days ago, a Holocaust survivor came over to my table and enumerated the dangers ahead of us. During the war, he had been in three death camps. He was a master of dangers. There wasn't a danger that he didn't know in the most minute detail.

The daily disasters evoke images of the Holocaust. Fifty-six years have passed, and the images don't go away. Last night, a man approached me and said that he reads all my books with great diligence. Like me, he was an orphaned child during the war, roaming the forests and taking refuge with farmers. He, too, arrived in Israel. He is an engineer, and he is worried about Jewish destiny. Why do the Jews arouse such hatred? he asked. We had naïvely thought that all the anger and hatred toward us would disappear once we had our own state. I didn't know what to say. I have never dealt in abstract questions—I try to see the world in pictures. And so I kept quiet while he, dismayed, also kept quiet.

After the attack on America, I stayed up all night watching television. It had been a long time since I'd felt such identification with events that were happening so far away. The next day, when I arrived at Ticho, it occurred to me that all of us here were feeling this blow in our flesh. In modern Jewish mythology, America is the father figure who saved many Jews from the cruel Bolsheviks and Nazis by granting us a home. Now the loving father is united with his sons in a Jerusalem coffee shop, in grief over the evil that refuses to disappear from the world.

—Aharon Appelfeld (Translated, from the Hebrew, by Dina Fein.)

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The sawhorses erected across Fourteenth Street last week reinstated a conceptual category of New York life that has, in recent years, become almost entirely meaningless: the uptown-downtown divide. It's been a while since the mere possession of a downtown address has been grounds for a conviction that you're in on anything that's really worth being in on, now that the artists and hipsters have been replaced by day-trippers bearing Prada shopping bags and millionaires buying apartments—the kind of people who, in their search for edge, have erased any remaining traces of it. Last week, though, as traffic to lower Manhattan was cut off and cops manned barricades at Fourteenth, Houston, Canal, and below, preventing pedestrians without a photo I.D. proving residential status from entering each neighborhood, an unsettling sense of exclusivity was restored to downtown. If the National Guardsmen in their Army fatigues standing at the intersections of the avenues brought to mind images of Checkpoint Charlie, a cop lifting the slender line of yellow tape to allow card-carrying residents downtown was reminiscent of that more familiar form of New York exclusion: the velvet rope at the night-club door.

By midweek, at Fourteenth Street and Eighth Avenue, lower Manhattan still looked like the kind of night club you might actually want to get into. Uptowners who had been turned back by cops at the barricade stood and watched while downtown residents ambled down an avenue that was nearly empty of traffic. In this stretch of the West Village, there were blocks that were almost celebratory: at the intersection of Christopher and West Streets, rollerbladers and drag queens and other young boulevardiers cheered passing rescue vehicles, submitting to a post-traumatic instinct to congregate. In SoHo, things became more sombre. On Sixth Avenue from Houston to Canal, Mack trucks from New Jersey, as yet empty of drivers and of loads, were parked two and three abreast, facing downtown, against traffic, of which there was none. The streets belonged to dog walkers and to the homeless, who had become suddenly more visible in the absence of other pedestrians, their shuffling walks and haunted faces seeming less the signs of mental illness and more like the mood of the city. West Broadway was mostly shuttered, but the French doors of the Italian restaurant Barolo were open to the street, and the flattering lights were turned on for the few diners who sat and ate ravioli, surgical masks pulled down around their necks. Darkened, gated warehouses looked like warehouses instead of boutiques or day spas. It was possible to remember how SoHo was when downtown was still downtown, before the bridge-and-tunnel crowd started snarling the streets and turning the bookstores into shoe stores—and then to think of the bridges closed and the tunnels empty, and, with some surprise, to wish that the sidewalks were clogged with chattering shoppers, and to wish to heaven they had never gone away.

—*Rebecca Mead*

♦

The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards.

Our leaders are bent on convincing us that everything is O.K. America is not afraid. Our spirit is unbroken, although this was a day that will live in infamy and America is now at war. But everything is not O.K. And this was not Pearl Harbor. We have a robotic President who assures us that America still stands tall. A wide spectrum of public figures, in and out of office, who are strongly opposed to the policies being pursued abroad by this Administration apparently feel free to say nothing more than that they stand united behind President Bush. A lot of thinking needs to be done, and perhaps is being done in Washington and elsewhere, about the ineptitude of American intelligence and counter-intelligence, about options available to American foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, and about what constitutes a smart program of military defense. But the public is not being asked to bear much of the burden of reality. The unanimously applauded, self-congratulatory bromides of a Soviet Party Congress seemed contemptible. The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.

Those in public office have let us know that they consider their task to be a manipulative one: confidence-building and grief management. Politics, the politics of a democracy—which entails disagreement, which promotes candor—has been replaced by psychotherapy. Let's by all means grieve together. But let's not be stupid together. A few shreds of historical awareness might help us understand what has just happened, and what may continue to happen. "Our country is strong," we are told again and again. I for one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not all America has to be.

—*Susan Sontag*

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In 1999, soon after moving to Fort Greene, in Brooklyn, my wife and I were befriended by Frank and Nicole De Martini, two architects. As construction manager of the World Trade Center, Frank worked in an office on the eighty-eighth floor of the north tower. Nicole is an employee of the engineering firm that built the World Trade Center, Leslie E. Robertson Associates. Hired as a "surveillance engineer," she was a member of a team that conducted year-round structural-integrity inspections of the Twin Towers. Her offices were on the thirty-fifth floor of the south tower.

Frank is forty-nine, sturdily built, with wavy salt-and-pepper hair and deeply etched laugh lines around his eyes. His manner is expansively avuncular. The Twin Towers were both a livelihood and a passion for him: he would speak of them with the absorbed fascination with which poets sometimes speak of Dante's canzones. Nicole is forty-two, blond and blue-eyed, with a gaze that is at once brisk and friendly. She was born in Basel, Switzerland, and met Frank while studying design in New York. They have two children—Sabrina, ten, and Dominic, eight. It was through our children that we first met.

Shortly after the basement bomb explosion of 1993, Frank was hired to do bomb-damage assessment at the World Trade Center. An assignment that he thought would last only a few months quickly turned into a consuming passion. "He fell in love with the buildings," Nicole told me. "For him, they represented an incredible human feat. He was awed by their scale and magnitude, by their design, and by the efficiency of the use of materials. One of his most repeated sayings about the towers is that they were built to take the impact of a light airplane."

On Tuesday morning, Frank and Nicole dropped their children off at school, in Brooklyn Heights, and then drove on to the World Trade Center. Traffic was light, and they arrived unexpectedly early, so Nicole decided to go up to Frank's office for a cup of coffee. It was about a quarter past eight when they got upstairs. A half hour later, she stood up to go. She was on her way out when the walls and the floor suddenly heaved under the shock of a massive impact. Through the window, she saw a wave of flame bursting out overhead, like a torrent spewing from the floodgates of a dam. The blast was clearly centered on the floor directly above; she assumed that it was a bomb. Neither she nor Frank was unduly alarmed: few people knew the building's strength and resilience better than they. They assumed that the worst was over and that the structure had absorbed the impact. Sure enough, within seconds of the initial tumult, a sense of calm descended on their floor. Frank herded Nicole and a group of some two dozen other people into a room that was relatively free of smoke. Then he went off to scout the escape routes and stairways. Minutes later, he returned to

announce that he had found a stairway that was intact. They could reach it fairly easily, by climbing over a pile of rubble.

The bank of rubble that barred the entrance to the fire escape was almost knee-high. Just as Nicole was about to clamber over, she noticed that Frank was hanging back. She begged him to come with her. He shook his head and told her to go on without him. There were people on their floor who had been hurt by the blast, he said; he would follow her down as soon as he had helped the injured.

Frank must have gone back to his office shortly afterward, because he made a call from his desk at about nine o' clock. He called his sister Nina, on West Ninety-third Street in Manhattan, and said, "Nicole and I are fine. Don't worry."

Nicole remembers the descent as quiet and orderly. The evacuees went down in single file, leaving room for the firemen who were running in the opposite direction. On many floors, there were people to direct the evacuees, and in the lower reaches of the building there was even electricity. The descent took about half an hour, and, on reaching the plaza, Nicole began to walk in the direction of the Brooklyn Bridge. She was within a few hundred feet of the bridge when the first tower collapsed. "It was like the onset of a nuclear winter," she said. "Suddenly, everything went absolutely quiet and you were in the middle of a fog that was as blindingly bright as a snowstorm on a sunny day."

It was early evening by the time Nicole reached Fort Greene. She had received calls from several people who had seen Frank on their way down the fire escape, but he had not been heard from directly. Their children stayed with us that night while Nicole sat up with Frank's sister Nina, waiting by the telephone.

The next morning, Nicole decided that her children had to be told that there was no word of their father. Both she and Nina were calm when they arrived at our door, even though they had not slept all night. Nicole's voice was grave but unwavering as she spoke to her children about what had happened the day before.

The children listened with wide-eyed interest, but soon afterward they went back to their interrupted games. A little later, my son came to me and whispered, "Guess what Dominic's doing?"

"What?" I said, steeling myself.

"He's learning to wiggle his ears."

This was, I realized, how my children—or any children, for that matter—would have responded: turning their attention elsewhere before the news could begin to gain purchase in their minds.

At about noon, we took the children to the park. It was a bright, sunny day, and they were soon absorbed in riding their bicycles. My wife, Deborah, and I sat on a shaded bench and spoke with Nicole. “Frank could easily have got out in the time that passed between the blast and the fall of the building,” Nicole said. “The only thing I can think of is that he stayed back to help with the evacuation. Nobody knew the building like he did, and he must have thought he had to.”

Nicole paused. “I think it was only because Frank saw me leave that he decided he could stay,” she said. “He knew that I would be safe and the kids would be looked after. That was why he felt he could go back to help the others. He loved the towers and had complete faith in them. Whatever happens, I know that what he did was his own choice.”

—Amitav Ghosh

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I live in New York. Today, Thursday, I am in Salzburg. I can see the Alps. Before Salzburg, Vienna. A business trip. In Vienna, a few hours after arriving on one of the last flights to leave J.F.K., I turned on the television. It was around 9 A.M. on Tuesday in New York. On television, a plane flew through the south tower of the World Trade Center. How many times did I watch that? I once worked in the World Trade Center. Suddenly, like everyone everywhere, I was on the telephone. Telephone. Television. Telephone. Television. Four planes? Eight planes? Where is the President? One out of ten of my calls to friends got through. We all praised the Mayor. I felt that I needed to find everyone, even people with whom I had not spoken in years. I did this to make myself safe—not from any threat to my body, posed by anything outside myself, but, perversely, from myself, from something inside me, my own feelings of powerlessness. I was removed from the situation. I was in no way removed from the situation. It was as if I might manage my own terror by overseeing the terror of others. I was not the only one like this. Those of my friends who were outside the city, trapped outside the city, as it were, were becoming a corps of unofficial worriers. And the Austrians, my hosts, worried over me. They worried over me so that I could be free to worry over New York. “Are you all right? Are you all right?” they would say to me over and over. And then: “Are you all right? Are you all right?” I would ask whomever I could reach in the city. A ring of worriers. Around that ring, another. I called with no regard for the time difference. “What is wrong with you? Don’t you know what’s going on here?” a close friend shouted at me. He was in a rage, and I began to cry, because I loved this person. Another friend, downtown in the Village, told

me that strange vans were parked on the street outside her building. And hadn't I heard something on CNN about the downtown gas mains? "Get out! Get out! Go north!" I shouted. Paranoia or levelheadedness? What was the difference? On CNN, people were hysterical, and so, since I was for the moment safe, I could afford to become empathically hysterical. I wanted to take away (even if this meant taking on) the hysteria that my friend might feel, but instead I was causing her to become afraid of vans parked outside. I had terrorized my friend. Was this an outcome of terrorism at work? On CNN, people were running north. Because I was not one of those people, and because I was reacting to reality, I was overreacting. I wanted to be home in New York, because it did not seem right to feel even relatively safe. Instead, I rode around Vienna in a car. "Much of the city was destroyed in the war," my host told me. Of course. I was in Europe, where the destruction of cities exists in living memory. Is the United States now a part of the rest of the world?

—Donald Antrim